

Good cold Sunday morning from a hill in Rockport.....

It's Valentine's Day! From *The Old Farmer's Almanac* for today, "In the modern era, Valentine's Day is all about celebrating love. It's now a holiday full of hearts, happiness, crushes, and Cupid, but it didn't start out this way. The origins of Valentine's Day are connected to the Roman feast of Lupercalia, a fertility festival held in honor of Lupa, a wolf figure prominent in ancient Roman folklore. These festivities were also dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture. Celebrations were rife with debauchery that included public drunkenness, nudity in the streets, and fertility rituals involving animal blood. Couples were sometimes matched by drawing names from a jar. While these fertility traditions persisted for hundreds of years, eventually the holiday sweetened. Rituals gave way to romance. Playwrights such as Shakespeare connected Valentine's Day and love in the public consciousness, while handmade cards became all the rage. In 1913, Hallmark Cards began to mass produce valentines, ushering in a new tradition available to everyone." Who knew?!?

Tomorrow is "Presidents' Day" which was originally established in 1885 in recognition of President George Washington. Who knew?!? As part of 1971's "Uniform Monday Holiday Act," President's Day was moved to the third Monday of February every year. You can't do your banking, or mail a letter, or trade your stocks, or go to school (on line or in person!) or conduct government business in city, county, state or federal offices on Presidents' Day, but you can go to Walmart, or Target, or eat out (with caution) at restaurants and buy your groceries (with caution)! (from a Google search about Presidents' Day)

Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, and next Sunday is the first Sunday in Lent. Would that the traditions and rituals of the Christian faith hold as much prominence in our lives as Valentine's Day and Presidents' Day.....

I know I've said this before, **AND** I want to say again how much I appreciate all your responses to my meditations, especially in these challenging times. I don't always get a chance to respond to each of your reflections, **AND** please know I read all of them, ponder them, and give thanks for them.... Your support spurs me on and gives me hope for the future of us all....

Blessings to each one on this second Sunday of February, Valentine's Day..... Susan

p.s. I will ATTEMPT, AGAIN, to download today's scripture reading and sermon to my Facebook page later today: freerangepastor for anyone who wants to tune in..... and I believe Margie is also downloading my sermons to Federated's Facebook page.... Lately downloading to Facebook has been a "hit or miss" affair!

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, February 14, 2021  
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

**A Call to Worship**

We long to hear of God's divine transforming voice  
and hope for new and deeper understanding.  
As we inherit the mantle of discipleship from those who have preceded us,  
may we experience a richer understanding  
of what it means to be disciples of God's love,  
even as we worship together not in physical space  
but always in loving spirit through cyberspace.  
All: Let us worship God.

**“A Prayer of Confession & Words of Assurance”**

Ever present God, there are times when we are overwhelmed with the world.

We face disappointments. We face adversities and uncertainties.

We sometimes feel like everything is moving in the opposite direction  
from the way things should be going.

Always available God, we look to you for renewed trust and hope.

We call out to you when we let fear and apprehension take over our lives.

We ask you for help, for assurance.

We hold on to the promise you have made to protect and love us.

Forgiving God, sometimes we fall short in our attempts to have faith in your promises.

We ask for forgiveness for those times. We look to you during the wilderness of Lent.

We seek to find ways to strengthen our faith in you.

Unwavering God, help us to face the difficulties in our own lives and the injustices we  
see around us with acceptance of your ways.

You are a trustworthy God. May we be anchored in your hope.

Be assured, and know that your prayers are heard, answered and remembered.

Amen.

### **Readings of Scripture – Mark 9:2-9**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” **He did not know what to say...**, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

**“he ordered them to tell no one”**

**or**

**“I will not live an unlived life”**

**A sermon based on Mark 9:2-9**

Will you pray with me. God of transformations, help us to see your appearances in our lives every day. Take off our dark glasses. Give us new lenses with which to see your presence among us. Remove the mountains of fear and skepticism that blind us from your glory moment by moment. Amen.

What is a theophany? Were we together in person today, I would ask for your definitions. Since we are together only in cyberspace today, I'll let you know my trusty *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* says a theophany is “an appearance of God that is perceptible to human sight.”<sup>[1]</sup> That definition helps me to understand why I have such a hard time putting a sermon together about Jesus' transfiguration high up on a mountaintop, and witnessed by three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John. An appearance of God perceptible to human sight, whether it comes in a burning bush or a cloud, is a tough thing to pin down and describe. What is one person's story about an appearance of God in their lives is another person's nightmare dream after eating too many pickles. What is one person's explanation of seeing the glory of God in their lives is just wishful thinking to another person.

Yet, the story of the transfiguration of Jesus is told in three of the four Gospels -- Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That tells us, as I've said to you before, that

the story is important. God shouts from the cloud overshadowing Jesus and his disciples on that mountaintop, “This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!” (Mk 9:7), so I am called, as a preacher, to say, “This story is important; listen to it!”

I’ve been listening all week and even as early as early this morning, I kept hearing different voices speaking to me about the story of Jesus’ transfiguration. Should we focus on *the place* of the story in the Gospels? It comes just after disciple Peter says he believes Jesus is the Messiah (Mk 8:29), and just before Jesus then foretells his death and resurrection (Mk 9:31-32). That makes it an appropriate story to hear at the beginning of Lent, as we start our journey this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, toward Holy Week and then Easter.

Should we focus on *the disciples’ response* to what they had seen of Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah – their fear and their inappropriate attempt to want to hold on to the moment by constructing tents or dwellings to honor Jesus and Moses and Elijah. (Mk 9:5-6) But there are lots of other stories in the Gospels in which we can think about the disciples’ not getting the message their leader was trying to tell them.

Should we focus on Jesus’ command to his three followers at the end of the story to *keep it a secret*, “As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” (Mk 9:9) The next verse tells us the disciples “kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.” (Mk 9:10)

But instead of talking about *the place* of the story of Jesus’ transfiguration in the whole scheme of the Gospels, instead of talking about *the response of the disciples* to the transfiguration of their leader, and instead of talking about *the secret* Jesus tells his disciples not to reveal, I want to retitile this sermon “I will not die an un-lived life.”

That verse is the title of a book and the opening line of a poem I’ll read to you, but first I want to give you a little background. This poem was written by Dr. Dawna Markova, a psychotherapist, a researcher, and a consultant to leaders of organizations from education to health care to corporations. She is an author and a storyteller, a parent and grandmother. I didn’t know of her work until a few years ago when a friend of mine told me she read this poem in the gift shop at the Mission of St. Luis Obispo in California some years ago.

When I “googled” Dawna Markova, I learned she was diagnosed with cancer thirty years ago and told she had six months to live. She wrote at the beginning of her book, “I wrote this poem the night my father died with a

shrug. His heart was hollow and vacant of dreams. He was convinced he didn't matter."<sup>[2]</sup> Her poetic words hold much more meaning when you know those facts about her life.

When I first read them in an e-mail from my friend, though, I didn't know of Markova's work or her past. My first thought, after reading them, was of imagining hearing Jesus say them, first to his disciples, and then to all of us here.

I will not die an unlived life.

I will not live in fear of falling  
or catching fire.

I choose to inhabit my days,  
to allow my living to open me,  
to make me less afraid,  
more accessible,  
to loosen my heart until it becomes  
a wing, a torch, a promise.

I choose to risk my significance;  
to live so that which came to me as seed  
goes to the next as blossom  
and that which came to me as blossom,  
goes on as fruit,  
fully alive.

Jesus did not die an unlived life, nor did his first disciples, nor do we.

Jesus did not live in fear of falling or catching fire, even though at times his disciples then and now do.

Jesus chose to inhabit his days, to allow his living to open him, to make him less afraid, more accessible, to loosen his heart until it became a wing, a torch, a promise.

Jesus choose to risk his significance;  
to live so that which came to him as seed from God would go to the next as  
blossom  
and that which came to him as blossom, would go on as fruit, fully alive.

We are the bearers of Jesus' lived life, of his courage, of his openness and accessibility, of his heart taken wing, lighting fires and making a promise of life for all time for those who desire to receive it.

We have the opportunity to risk *our* significance, to live as seed from God so we might go on as blossom in others' lives.

We might be the blossom of *the seed of others* that we go on as fruit full of goodness and God's glory, nourishing yet others who are fearful and afraid of living brightly every day.

A new friend introduced me to the poetic words of Dawna Markova some years ago. From seed to blossom my friend and I and all of you approach the challenge of being fully alive in these coming days of Lent.

If we do nothing else in our remaining days on earth, let us not die un-lived lives, and let us live them in earnest discipleship of Jesus and for the greater glory of God.

Let the people say, "Amen."

### **To hold in our prayers this day.....**

**And** hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus....

**And** all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs and alcohol among their members....

**And** all those who have worked tirelessly for the building and rebuilding of our nation into one people, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.....

**And** pray for our new President, and Congress, that they might do the right things in office for the betterment and future of all of us.....

**And** add to our prayers, Mike Sodano, who has had three-way bypass surgery this week, a friend of Mimi's and known to many in Thomaston, extended family members of Sandra Caron who all had the covid virus and have recovered! – Allie in Maryland, and Dan and his wife and stepson in Buffalo, NY; "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; and continued prayers for Hank Cary, Ed Lee, Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula, Elliot, Trish Perry, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, and Michael and Gail in southern Maine, ....

***Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday.....***

***AND those you would like for me to remove from this list.***

### **A Benediction**

*Life is short, no matter the length of our days.  
We do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those  
who make the way with us.*

*So be swift to love.  
Make haste to be kind.  
And may the creator of us all,  
the redeemer of us all,  
and the sustainer of us all  
be with you now and forever.  
Amen.*

(adapted from the words of Henri Frederic Amiel, 1821 – 1881,  
Swiss moral philosopher, poet & critic)

**Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)**

**For Sunday, February 21, 2021 – First Sunday of Lent**

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

**Words to ponder today about “transfiguration”.....**

*“Made to bear the image of God we re-reflect or de-reflect that image by the choices we make.”*

~ Stephen Eyre

*“Whoever does not see God in every place does not see God in any place.”*

~ Rabbi Elimelech, 1717-1787

*“It is evident that immunity to any transcendent voice and disregard of neighbor leads finally to the disappearance of passion.” ~ Walter Brueggemann, 20th century in *The Prophetic Imagination**

*“The human journey is a continuous act of transfiguration.” ~ John O’Donohue, Irish poet, author, priest and Hegelian philosopher, 1956-2008*

*“I need to take a sacred pause, as if I were a sun warmed rock in the center of a rushing river.”*

~ Dawna Markova, author, teacher, psychotherapist, researcher.....

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[1] Donald K. McKin, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p. 282.

[2]Dawna Markova, *I Will Not Die An Unlived Life: Reclaiming Purpose and Passion*, York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2000, p 3.